

April 20, 2015

HON. SENATOR PIA S. CAYETANO
Chairperson Designate
Committee on Health and Demography
Senate of the Philippines

Attn: **Atty. Seter Dela Cruz-Cordez**
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Dear Senator Cayetano:

Greetings from the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO)!

We would like to express our full support for the House and Senate Bills on the Revised Philippine HIV and AIDS Policy Program Act. The issue on migrant health is among the recent advocacies of the CFO together with the Department of Health and other migrant and health related agencies.

In fact, during our annual Month of Overseas Filipinos - National Forum on Migration held last December 2014, one of the issues that surfaced include the problems of Filipino migrants afflicted with HIV-AIDS. During that Forum we saw the need for more information campaign among migrants and prospective migrants on health issues, as well as a stigma-free care and support program for our overseas Filipinos with HIV-AIDS.

We are thus pleased to provide you with the following inputs for Senate Bill No. 3398:

1. **Use of the more inclusive term “overseas Filipinos”** instead of “OFWs” in all the provisions of the bill. Using the term OFs covers not only the workers, but also Filipino immigrants, spouses and partners of other foreign nationals, students and trainees, irregular migrants, among others who may also be vulnerable to HIV-AIDS.
2. Inclusion of other migrant and health-related government agencies in formulating the comprehensive reintegration, care, and support program for overseas Filipinos inflicted with HIV-AIDS. May we request that Sec. 9 be revised as follow:

Sec. 9 (e) Care and Support for Overseas Filipinos Living with HIV. The Overseas Workers Welfare Administration, in coordination with the DSWD, DOH, PhilHealth, DFA, POEA, Commission on Filipinos Overseas, National Reintegration Center for OFWs, and Bureau of Quarantine shall develop a program to provide a stigma-free comprehensive reintegration, care and support

program, including economic, social and medical support, for overseas Filipinos who have been repatriated or are about to be repatriated due to their HIV status.

3. Attendance to a separate seminar on HIV-AIDS shall only be made optional, and not mandatory to all Filipinos migrating to other countries. It may entail additional time and resources for Filipinos going abroad if they will be required to attend such seminar.

Unless there is an alarming increase of HIV-AIDS cases (backed up by official data/statistics) involving overseas Filipinos in specific destination country say for example Saudi Arabia or UAE, or for a specific migrant sector such as the seafarers, then the bill may add the provision on mandatory attendance to the seminar specifically for affected countries or specific migrant sector.

But for now, it would be better if a module on HIV-AIDS is included in the pre-departure orientation, pre-employment seminar, and other information dissemination campaign conducted by migrant-related government agencies (DFA, CFO, POEA, OWWA) and their accredited PDOS providers. The PDOS officers, instructors, trainors and focal persons of these agencies and providers, shall undergo a training from the Philippine National AIDS Council or DOH about HIV-AIDS and ways that this could be prevented. For your consideration, may we request that Sec. 15 be revised as follow:

Sec. 15. Education for Filipinos Going Abroad. The DFA, CFO, DOLE, POEA, OWWA, and their accredited PDOS providers shall include in their pre-employment seminars for prospective migrants and pre-departure orientations for emigrants; overseas Filipino workers; participants of exchange visitor/internship and cultural exchange programs; diplomatic, military, trade, labor officials, personnel and their families to be assigned overseas, a module on HIV-AIDS. Officers and trainors of these agencies and PDOS providers shall be trained by PNAC on the subject matter, and provided with information on how to access on-site HIV-related services and facilities prior their migration overseas.

We hope you find our inputs useful for the consolidation of the two bills. For clarifications and other concerns, your staff may contact Mr. Frenzel Tingga (Policy, Planning and Research Division, tel. no.: 552-4766, email: ftingga@cfo.gov.ph) or Ms. Janet Ramos (Migrant Integration and Education Division, tel. no.: 552-4744, email: jramos@cfo.gov.ph).

Best regards.

Very truly yours,

SECRETARY IMELDA M. NICOLAS
Chairperson